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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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----------128163 291808Z /43
R 291600Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2495
INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRASILIA 5373

EO 11652 GDS
TAGS PINT SHUM BR
SUBJECT: MCB LEADERS ATTACK GOVERNMENT IN SPEECHES TELEVISED NATIONALLY

1. SUMMARY: THE OPPOSITION MDB AVAILED ITSELF OF AN OBSCURE PROVISION IN THE ELECTORAL LAWS TO OBTAIN ONE HOUR OF FREE RADIO-TV PRIME TIME JUNE 27 FOR ITS FOUR TOP LEADERS TO MAKE SPEECHES ATTACKING THE GEISEL GOVERNMENT. SPECIAL TARGETS OF MDB INVECTIVE WERE THE EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES, THE RIGGED POLITICAL REFORMS OF APRIL, CENSORSHIP, THE ALLEGED CONTINUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND AN ECONOMIC MODEL SEEN AS UNJUST TO LABOR. SUBSEQUENT TELEPHONE POLLS SHOWED THAT PROGRAM HAD BEEN WIDELY AND, IN LARGE MAJORITY OF CASES, FAVORABLY RECEIVED BY MILLIONS OF BRAZILIANS. EXPLANATIONS ADVANCED SO FAR AS TO WHY GOVERNMENT, NORMALLY SO CAUTIOUS ABOUT MASS MEDIA USE, ALLOWED THE PROGRAM INCLUDE SIMPLE OVERSIGHT DESIRE TO IMPROVE BRAZIL'S HUMAN RIGHTS IMAGE ABROAD, OR PRESIDENT'S INTEREST IN MAKING A CONCILIATORY GESTURE TO THE OPPOSITION FOLLOWING THE UNPOPULAR APRIL REFORMS
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AND THE ENSURING POLARIZATION. END SUMMARY.

3. THE TOP LEADERSHIP OF THE OPPOSITION MDB LAMBASTED THE GOVERNMENT IN ONE HOUR SPEECHES JUNE 27 TO A NATIONWIDE RADIO-TV PRIME TIME AUDIENCE ESTIMATED AS HIGH AS 30 MILLION. SPEAKING FOR THE MDB IN THE TAPED RADIO SPECIAL WERE PARTY PRESIDENT ULYSSES GUIMARAES, SEANTE LEADER ANDRE FRANCO MONTORO, CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES

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MINORITY LEADER ALENCAR FURTADO, AND FEDERAL DEPUTY ALCEU COLLARES, WHO IS DIRECTOR OF THE MDG'S THINK TANK, THE INSTITUTO PEDRO HORTASA. THE MDB WAS GRANTED THE AIR TIME BY THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL UNDER LEGISLATION FIRST ENACTED IN 1965 AND SUBSEQUENTLY AMENDED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, MOST RECENTLY IN MID-1976, WHICH GRANTS BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES FREE USE OF THE MEDIA EACH YEAR TO TRANSMIT THE PROCEEDINGS OF PARTY MEETINGS. THIS WAS THE FIRST OCCASION IN WHICH THE MDB HAS BEEN ABLE TO ADDRESS A NATIONWIDE RADIO-TV AUDIENCE SINCE THE 1974 ELECTIONS. THE 1976 RESTRICTIVE "LEI FALCAO" EFFECTIVELY BANNED THE USE OF THE RADIO AND TV FOR THE 1976 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS CAMPAIGN AND THE PRESIDENT'S CONSTITUTIONAL AND ELECTORAL REFORMS OF APRIL 1977 FURTHER EXTENDED THESE RESTRICTIONS TO ALL ELECTIONS, THOUGH FAILING TO ABROGATE THE PROVISIONS GRANTING YEARLY ACCESS TO THE MEDIA BY THE PARTIES.

3. FEDERAL ATTORNEY GENERAL HENRIQUE ALFONSO DE ARAUJO ENTERED A LAST MINUTE PETITION WITH THE FEDERAL TRIBUNAL TO PLACE THE MDB ON NOTICE TO COMPLY STRICTLY WITH THE LEGAL REQUIREMENTS THAT THE MATERIAL AIRED BE A DIRECT REPORTING OF THE PARTY CONGRESS'S PUBLIC SESSIONS AND THAT IT CONCERN ITSELF EXCLUSIVELY TO THE PARTY PROGRAM. THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S PETITION NOTED THAT IT WAS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRESIDENT TO COMPLY WITH THESE REQUIREMENTS. MDB REPRESENTATIVES, HOWEVER, IN RESPONDING TO THE PETITION, SATISFIED THE ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL THAT THESE REQUIREMENTS WOULD BE MET. A PRESIDENTIAL PALACE PRESS SPOKESMAN SUBSEQUENTLY CONFIDENTIAL

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DENIED THAT THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH PLANNED TO PREVENT THE PROGRAM.

4. IN HIS LEADOFF ADDRESS, PARTY PRESIDENT GUIMARAES ATTACKED AI-5, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS "POWER BUT NOT GOVERNMENT" AND A WITNESS TO DEMOCRATIC ABNORMALITY IN BRAZIL. GUIMARAES ATTACKED THE GOVERNMENT FOR UNSEATING ELECTED OFFICIALS, SUSPENDING POLITICAL RIGHTS AND CENSORING THE MEDIA.

5. FEDERAL DEPUTY ALENCAR FURTADO ACCUSED THE GOVERNMENT OF AFFRONTING THE ".MAJESTY OF THE PEOPLE" BY DEPRIVING IT OF LIBERY AND PARTICIPATION. BY ITS EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES, FURTADO WENT ON, THE REGIME "BASTARDIZED THE LAW, WOUNDED THE JUDICIARY, SHATTERED THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH, AND PLACED THE COUNTRY'S LEADERS ABOVE THE CONSTITUTION ITSELF." FURTADO ENDED BY NOTING THE CONTINUATION OF ARBITRARY ARRESTS, UNJUST PUNISHMENT AND DIS-APPEARANCES, AND REAFFIRMED THE MDB'S COMMITMENT TO THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THE MDB, HE CONCLUDED, OFFERED THE POPULAR ALTERNATIVE OF A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY.

6. FRANCO MONTORO ASSAILED THE GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC POLICY, POINTING TO FOREIGN DEBT NOW APPROACHING $30 BILLION AND SPIRALING COSTS OF LIVING. HE CALLED THE APRIL "REFORMS" AND THE ENSUING

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CASSATIONS A "GRAVE AND DANGEROUS RETROGRESSION." HE HELD UP AS A POSITIVE EXAMPLE THE COMMITMENT OF PRESIDENT CARTER TO HUMAN RIGHTS, NOTING THAT THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE US BELIES THE ARGEMENT INVOKED HERE THAT DEMOCRACY MUST COME ONLY AFTER DEVELOPMENT
.

7. ALCEU COLLARES REAFFIRMED THE MDB"S COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING CONDITIONS OF WORKERS WHICH HE SAW AS ONLY COMING ABOUT THROUGH PROFOUND CHANGES OF THE ECONOMIC MODEL. HE APPEALED FOR GREATER TRADE UNION FREEDOM AND SCORED THE PRESENT WAGE SETTING PRO-CEDURES FOR PERMITTING STEADY DECLINE IN REAL WAGES OF BRAZILIAN WORKERS.

8. A POST-PROGRAM TELEPHONE POLL CONDUCTED BY RIO'S JORNAL DO
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BRASIL OF MORE THAN 900 PERSONS IN RIO AND 12 OTHER STATE CAPTIALS SHOWED THAT 70 PERCENT OF THE RESPONDENTS HAD SEEN THE MDB'S PROGRAM AND OF THOSE 69 PERCENT WERE IN FAVOR.

9. COMMENT: PRELIMINARY REACTION IN GOVERNMENT POLITICAL CIRCLES AND IN THE GOVERNMENT-ORIENTED PRESS IS THAT THE MDB, BY ITS PERFORMANCE ON RADIO-TV PROVED ITSELF TO BE RADICALIZED, ANTI-GOVERNMENT, ANTI-REVOLUTION OR EVEN "ANTI-PEOPLE," AS WELL AS AN UNWORTHY INTERLOCUTOR IN THE DIALOG IN A SEARCH FOR CONSTITUION-AL RULE.

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AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BRASILIA 5373

THE KEY QUESTION OF COURSE IS WHY OR HOW THE GOVERNMENT ALLOWED THE MDB THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTACK IT AND ITS POLICIES FOR ONE HOUR DURING PRIME TIME IN NATIONWIDE RADIO-TV HOOKUP, CONSIDERING THE GOVERNMENT'S NORMALLY TIGHT CONTROL OVER THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA. ALREADY THE EXPLANATION HAS BEEN ADVANCED THAT THE MDB TOOK ADVANTAGE OF AN OVERSIGHT IN THE GOVERNMENT'S RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION ON RADIO-TV USE AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT CHOSE TO LET THE PROGRAM GO THROUGH RATHER THAN RISK FURTHER DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM BY FURTHER ARBITRARY ACTIONS. MORE LIBERAL ARENA LEADERS HAVE CLAIMED THAT THIS CONCESSION OF MDB WAS INTENDED TO BE A DRAMATIC AND TIMELY PROOF TO INTERNATIONAL CRITICS THAT BRAZIL IS NOT A DICTATORSHIP AND THAT THE OPPOSITION FUNCTIONS WITH REASONABLE FREEDOM HERE. VETERAN POLITICAL COLUMNIST CASTELLO BRANCO CLAIMS THAT MDB OPPORTUNITY WAS NOT THE RESULT OF AN OVERSIGHT OR THE IRREVERSIBLE DECISION OF THE COURTS, WHICH IN ANY CASE COULD HAVE EASILY BEEN OVERCOME WITH A SPECIAL MEASURE BASED ON NATIONAL SECURITY NEEDS. CASTELLO BRANCO CLAIMS THAT THE CONCESSION TO MDB WAS A GESTURE BY THE ADMINISTRATION TO DEMONSTRATE ITS CONCILIATORY INTENTIONS
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TOWARD THE OPPOSITION IN THE WAKE OF THE CONTROVERSIAL APRIL POLITICAL REFORMS AND THE ENSUING INCREASE IN POLARIZATION WHICH CULMINATED IN THE CASSATION OF FEDERAL DEPUTY MARCOS TITO JUNE 14. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT ALLOWEDD THE MDB THIS OPPORTUNITY NOW, RATHER THAN AT THE MORE PERILOUS TIME OF THE NEXT ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER 1978, IT WAS NOT A TOTALLY RISK-FREE GERSTURE. IT CAN HARDLY BE EXPECTED TO IMPROVE THE ATTITUDES OF THE CONSERVATIVE SECTORS OF THE SYSTEM TOWARD PRESIDENT GEISEL, WHO THEY WILL NOW BE ABLE TO CLAIM HAS ALLOWED AND EVEN ASSISTED THE MDB TO ATTACK THE REVOLUTION ON NATIONAL RADIO-TV. MOREOVER, JUDGING BY THE PRELIMINARY POLLS, THE MDGB.S MESSAGE WAS WIDELY HEARD AND FAVORABLY ASSIMULATED, A DEVELOPMENT UNLIKELY TO HELP REVERSE THE DOWNWARD TREND IN THE GOVERNMENT'S CREDIBILITY AND POPULARITY. THE MDB ITSELF APPARENTLY DID NOT CONSIDER THE OPPORTUNITY AN ACT OF GOVERNMENT GENEROSITY, AND THEY PULLED NO PUNCHES. WE NOTE, HOWEVER, THAT THE MDB'S MOST EFFECTIVE AND WASPISH ANTI-GOVERNMENT ORATOR, SENATOR PAULO BROSSARD, WHO DID ADDRESS THE ORIGINAL MDB'S SYMPOSIUM FROM WHICH THE TAPED ADDRESSES WERE TAKEN, WAS CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT FROM THE ONE HOUR TELEVISED PROGRAM.
END COMMENT.
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